

Ride for Karen comes through Aurora this Sunday



By Brock Weir

Be on the lookout for cyclists this Sunday for Ride for Karen.

The annual ride to raise money for children battling and effected by cancer, was founded in 2002, by the children and family of Karen Tobias. Since its inception, the ride has raised over \$1.8 million to build and furnish new cancer care centres and send children living and affected by cancer to camp for the summer.

This year's ride leaves Sunday from Maple's St. Joan of Arc High School. Registration begins at 7.30 a.m. with the ride kicking off at 9 a.m. There are various routes of various lengths taking place to cater for each rider, but it is the 160km 'Century Ride' which will bring participants through Aurora.

Heading south from Newmarket, riders will eventually head down McCowan Road before heading west on Vandorf Sideroad to Bayview and then southbound on Bayview to Bloomington as they continue west out of Aurora towards King.

Among the cyclists this year will be Aurora lawyer Russ Howe. Mr. Howe, a partner in Boland Howe on Industrial Parkway, wanted to be a part of the Ride the minute he heard about it three years ago.

A participant in the Toronto Ride to Conquer Cancer, the idea of doing something more local with a focus on children appealed to him.

'When you hear about a ride in the area for kids with cancer, you just can't say not to that,' he says. 'My grandfather passed away from cancer, my dad had cancer, my business partner had cancer, and I don't know anybody who doesn't have something in their family who has had a fight with cancer. When it is children, it is worth that much more going for.'

When he made his first inroads into Ride for Karen two years ago, Mr. Howe says he was struck by the friendliness of the crowd. He didn't have any friends joining him that year but within five or 10 minutes, he had found new friends to ride with.

'100k is a long way for a middle-aged, overweight guy!?' he says with a laugh. 'I am going over four hours riding that 100k. I am not a particularly fast rider, but there are a couple of hills that really challenge you for sure. The nice thing about it is when you're out on the road, you're sure to find a group of people who are riding the same speed as you and when you're riding around chatting about stuff, it doesn't hurt as bad as if you're riding by yourself thinking about it!'

When he finds the time, Mr. Howe says he particularly enjoys training by riding his bike on the roads and trails in and around Aurora. In the weeks leading up to the Ride, he has been focusing on his training, riding three or four times a week, trying to eat better, and everything possible to help him over some of those more challenging hills. Another priority is making sure his bike is in

tip-top shape so he's not unexpectedly stranded somewhere along the route.

'It's really about prioritizing it,' he says of finding the time to train. 'This is going to sound terrible, but Sons of Anarchy is not on TV and all the good TV shows are down, so there are less things to suck my butt on the couch and keep me from doing it!'

Although he enjoys riding through Aurora, one of his favourite spots on the route are the flat, scenic landscapes of the Holland Landing area. On some of these flatter areas where it is easier to essentially go with the flow, he has found time to think and reflect about what he has learned about himself in the challenge.

'When I get to the end of the ride, there is a feeling you have just done something significant to help people who are in a lot of trouble, and it almost makes you hungry to do good things for other people,' he says. 'Sometimes you forget about that. You're paying the bills, you're doing all kinds of stuff, but when you take a little time to look at the bigger issue and other people, I think you are better for it.'

'The Ride for Karen is really friendly and uplifting. It's a great group of people, you're going to meet people you like, make friends, and the most important thing is it is not a race. It is set up for people of all speeds and all abilities. If you are just an occasional cyclist, it is going to take you longer to do it, but it is a great way to see the area and meet new people. If you can't feel good with helping kids with cancer, you've got a problem!'

For more information on Ride for Karen, visit www.rideforkaren.com.